

## Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05

OMB-01 SAM-01 /063 W  
----- 117989

R 292035Z JUL 75  
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2075

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E. O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, AR  
SUBJECT: IMPROVED GOVERNMENT-PRESS RELATIONS IN ARGENTINA

REF: BA 3557

SUMMARY. A NEW ERA IN GOVERNMENT-PRESS RELATIONS APPEARS TO HAVE BEGUN WITH THE RECENT APPOINTMENT OF JOSE JOAQUIN STUPENENO AS PRESIDENTIAL PRESS SECRETARY. THE CHANGE IN ATMOSPHERE IS PALPABLE, BUT HOW LONG IT WILL LAST IS OPEN TO QUESTION. END SUMMARY.

1. ON JULY 22 JOSE JOAQUIN STUPENENO REPLACED JOSE MARIA VILLONE AS PRESIDENTIAL PRESS SECRETARY. ACCORDING TO EMBASSY SOURCES, STUPENENO, A WELL KNOWN TV PRODUCER WHOSE MOST RECENT JOB WAS PRESS SECRETARY FOR THE CITY OF BUENOS AIRES, WAS SUGGESTED FOR THE JOB BY MIN EDUCATION OSCAR IVANISSEVICH. HE IS NOT A PERONIST, AND HIS APPOINTMENT RAISED SOME EYEBROWS AND A FEW OBJECTIONS IN PERONIST CIRCLES. ADDITIONALLY, HE IS THE SON OF NAVAL CAPTAIN STUPENENO, ONE OF THE LEADERS OF THE 1955 REVOLUTION THAT OVERTHREW THE PERON GOVERNMENT.

2. VILLONE'S TENURE AS PRESS SECRETARY WAS CHARACTERIZED BY AN OVER TIGHTENING KNOT OF OVERT AND COVERT GOVERNMENT ATTEMPTS TO CENSURE THE NEWS MEDIA (SEE REFTEL).

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STUPENENO LOST LITTLE TIME IN CHANGING THE IMAGE

HIS PREDECESSOR HAD GIVEN TO THE OFFICE. HIS ACTIONS INDICATE THAT A NEW ERA IN GOVT-PRESS RELATIONS HAS BEGUN. HE VISITED SEVERAL KEY NEWSPAPERS DURING HIS FIRST DAY ON THE JOB AND THE MESSAGE HE CARRIED WAS ONE OF MODERATION AND COMPROMISE. HE PROMISED "EVENHANDED TREATMENT" AND "OPENNESS" IN DEALING WITH THE NEWS MEDIA. THIS WAS INTERPRETED AS MEANING AN END TO GOVERNMENT MANIPULATION OF OFFICIAL PUBLICITY AS A METHOD OF CENSORSHIP. IN ADDITION, STUPENENGO ADVISED HE WOULD PROPOSE THE REPEAL OF DECREE 1273 WHICH PROHIBITED LOCAL NEWS MEDIA FROM USING INFORMATION ABOUT ARGENTINA OBTAINED FROM FOREIGN NEWS AGENCIES (SEE REFTEL). FINALLY, HE ASKED FOR "PATIENCE" WITH REGARD TO THE DEBTS (TOTALING SEVERAL HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS) THAT TELAM, THE OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT NEWS AGENCY, HAS RUN UP WITH LOCAL NEWS MEDIA FOR GOVERNMENT PUBLICITY. SOME MEDIA, NOTABLY PROVINCIAL NEWSPAPERS, FACE A SERIOUS LIQUIDITY CRISIS AS A RESULT OF OFFICIAL PUBLICITY PAYMENT DELAYS. STUPENENGO PROMISED TO SEEKS A PROMPT RESOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM.

3. NEWS MEDIA WASTED LITTLE TIME IN PUTTING THE "OPENNESS" POLICY TO THE TEST. WITHIN 24 HOURS LOCAL GOVERNMENT-OWNED TV STATIONS HAD BROADCAST SEVERAL COMMENTARIES CRITICAL OF THE GOVERNMENT, INCLUDING AN INTERVIEW WITH UCR LEADER RICARDO BALBIN IN WHICH HE CALLED UPON MRS M PERON TO TAKE A LEAVE OF ABSENCE AND REST. NEWSPAPERS HAVE ALSO STEPPED UP THEIR IN-DEPTH REPORTING OF THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CRISIS. OUTRIGHT CRITICISM ONCE LIMITED TO LA PRENSA AND MORE RECENTLY ESPoused BY LEFTIST-INTELLECTUAL LA OPINION, HAS SPREAD TO MOST OTHER NEWSPAPERS. ONE PRESS SOURCE CALLED THESE DEVELOPMENTS "A BREATH OF FRESH AIR IN A STALE ROOM."

4. COMMENT. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT A PALPABLE CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT INFORMATION POLICY IS TAKING PLACE. CONSERVATIVE LA PRENSA, LONG ONE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S SEVEREST CRITICS, WENT SO FAR AS TO EDITORIALIZE THAT "THE POSSIBLE CHANGES IN THE FUTURE CONDUCT OF THE PRESS SECRETARIAT COULD BE THE TOUCHSTONE OF THE POLITICAL COURSE OF THE GOVERNMENT." HOW LONG IT CAN CONFIDENTIAL

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LAST, HOWEVER, IS OPEN TO SERIOUS QUESTION. WHEN ASKED BY ONE NEWMAN HOW LONG HE EXPECTED TO REMAIN IN OFFICE, STUPENENGO ANSWERED "ABOUT ONE WEEK." NEVERTHELESS, HOWEVER LONG HIS TENURE AS PRESS SECRETARY MAY BE, IT SEEMS DOUBTFUL THAT THE NEWS MEDIA WOULD DOCILELY ACCEPT A RETURN TO THEIR FORMER MUZZLED CONDITION. FRESH AIR CAN BE INVIGORATING.

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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptoning:** X  
**Capture Date:** 01 JAN 1994  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** INFORMATION MEDIA, POLICIES, PERSONNEL APPOINTMENTS, CENTRAL GOVERNMENT  
**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 29 JUL 1975  
**Decapton Date:** 01 JAN 1960  
**Decapton Note:**  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Authority:** greenet  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
**Disposition Remarks:**  
**Document Number:** 1975BUENOS05095  
**Document Source:** CORE  
**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** n/a  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** GS  
**Errors:** N/A  
**Film Number:** D750262-0233  
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**Image Path:**  
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**Legacy Key:** link1975/newtext/t1975079/aaaaaics.tel  
**Line Count:** 114  
**Locator:** TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM  
**Office:** ACTION ARA  
**Original Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Original Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Original Previous Classification:** n/a  
**Original Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Page Count:** 3  
**Previous Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Previous Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Reference:** 75 BUENOS AIRES 3557  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Authority:** greenet  
**Review Comment:** n/a  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 02 SEP 2003  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review History:** RELEASED <02 SEP 2003 by WorrelSW>; APPROVED <17 DEC 2003 by greenet>  
**Review Markings:**

Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
06 JUL 2006

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** IMPROVED GOVERNMENT-PRESS RELATIONS IN ARGENTINA  
**TAGS:** PINT, PGOV, AR, (STUPENENGO, JOSE JOAQUIN)  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006